

Canadian Premier League set to kick off in York Region

By Jake Courtepatte



There is always room for more footy in the soccer hotbed of York Region.

That was the thought process of the York Sports and Entertainment organization when they announced last week the formation of York 9 FC, the first of eight clubs that will kick off the inaugural Canadian Premier League season.

"I have spent my whole life in here. The time is right for York Region to develop its own identity," said Jim Brennan, part owner of the team and past president of the Aurora FC. "This is a booming area that is diverse, youthful and passionate about football. It is our goal to ensure that when York 9 FC steps on to the pitch, it will reflect what our community is all about."

Brennan joins local housing developer Carlo Baldassarra, owner of Grennpark Group, and businessman Preben Ganzhorn in creating the first club to bring together each municipality of the region under one emblem.

Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, King, Markham, Newmarket, Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Whitchurch-Stouffville are all represented by the bars in York 9 FC's vibrant green emblem, which symbolizes York Region's forests. The charcoal grey and black-on-black close out the logo's colour pallet and represent the Black Creek River.

"Our club, York, is about the nine municipalities," said Brennan. "We want to create a culture where everyone in York Region looks and says, 'This is our pro club.' If they still want to support Toronto FC, absolutely, of course, it's a fantastic club but we really want people in York Region to understand this club is all about the community and York 9 represents every single municipality."

The fledgling club is the first to debut its colours among the eight that are expected to compete in the first CPL season, joining Hamilton, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Halifax as established locations.

Edmonton and Ottawa are widely expected to be confirmed as locations in the next few weeks, while a group based in British Columbia have yet to choose a landing spot.

Expected to sit one level below the top-tier Major League Soccer on the North American system, CPL Chairman David Clanachan is hoping to fill a gap between youth sports and pro soccer without forcing athletes to go overseas.

"It's unconscionable to think a country the size of Canada, the 10th largest economy in the world, does not have a premier league," Clanachan said. "And we're the only country in the top 10 that does not have a premier league."

According to Stats Canada, soccer is the fastest growing sport in the country, with more than 10 per cent of Canadians playing at least once a week.

York Region has close to 60,000 registered soccer players.

"The demand's here, the support's here," Brennan said. "The one thing we were missing in the region was actually having a pro club. And now we've been fortunate enough to bring one here."

York 9 will play their inaugural, and most likely second, seasons out of the York University Stadium, though Ganzhorn said the organization will be looking for a location in York Region to build a 12,000-15,000-seat stadium, similar to those in Europe or Central America.

"We've already had a bunch of meetings with different parties in the region," said Ganzhorn. "We've looked at some fantastic places where we can build stadiums, but it's a work in progress right now to figure out where we want to build, what the infrastructure is like in the area."